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Senator Osten, Senator Formica, and Representative Wallace,

Thank you for inviting us to testify today.

I am a coordinator and parent educator for the Plainfield Family Resource Center, and want to explain a couple of the reasons why I think the FRCs should be conserved as a line item.

You have heard about how Resource Centers help children get ready for school. What is less commonly discussed is that FRCs have a broad mandate to identify family and school related needs particular to their towns and respond to them. This gives us some freedom to act that other agencies lack. I think a couple of examples from our town will illustrate how this plays out.

Plainfield is a poor rural town in the Eastern corner of the state: about 50% of our students receive free or reduced lunch. At a meeting last week our local police reported that over 50% of their visits to homes are mental health or drug related. Last week, in a pre-K to grade 3 school of about 600 students, 3 parents died of overdoses. In a two week period, a total of 9 families were involved in drug-related incidents.

The principal of that school knows that the FRC has been very active as co-chairs of a regional mental health committee, so he contacted us to help begin to develop a plan to help these families and the larger school community. We have reached out to DMHAS, the National Alliance for Mental Illness, Narcotics Anonymous, the State Department of Education, and local service providers to help. We expect that the FRCs will retain a key role in helping the school find its way through an epidemic that will not recede anytime soon.

That mental health committee is part of the larger Northeast Early Childhood Council. It has already been instrumental in bringing over \$600,000 worth of Child First money to our region, has published a regional guide to drug and mental health services, and shares current mental health information with about 80 members.

This is just one example of how we identified a need, and used our broad mandate to meet that need.

Let me describe another example.

Our town is poorly educated relative to the rest of the state. The Plainfield FRC supports the regional adult ed provider, EASTCONN, by paying for child care for adult ed students. One of our adult ed students, a single 21 year old mother who has no license and has a learning disability, was unsuccessful in getting her GED. (We watched her daughter twice a week for two years while she tried.) Now this mom is enrolled in an NEDP program, where she shows promise of success. This mom had a computer which was not powerful enough for her to complete her on-line assignments, so we worked together with a teacher in the school whose husband is

a computer technician. She bought a computer for \$80 from him, which she is paying for in \$5 installments.

Once again, we used our broad mandate to identify a need and solve the pieces of the problem.

I'd like to describe one more example of the way we use our FRC funds:

In our town, many of our children in grades 4-6 go home to no one. Plainfield does not qualify for the after school money that many urban cities do. Funding for many after-school programs must be found either within the already stretched school budget, or from sources like ours. Last year close to \$20,000 of our budget was used to provide academically-based programs for over 100 children. Teachers tell us that the warm relationships created in these responsive settings are game-changers for many children, who before attending them felt disconnected from the school community.

Every FRC could relate stories like this. My point is that it makes sense to send supplies and resources to the boots on the ground.

Thank you for your time.